

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01  
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 OMB-01 NEAE-00 /082 W  
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P R 211208Z JAN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
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INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
WMEMBASSY DACCA 5263  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
AMCONSUL BOMBAY  
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
AMCONSUL MADRAS  
USLO PEKING  
USCINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 1016

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, IN  
SUBJ: THE OPPOSITION AND THE ELECTIONS

1. ALTHOUGH OBVIOUSLY CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY MRS GANDHI'S  
JANUARY 18 ANNOUNCEMENT OF A "SNAP POLL," LEADERS OF THE  
FOUR NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION PARTIES (CONGRESS (O),  
SOCIALIST PARTY, JAN SANGH AND BLD) MOVED QUICKLY TO WORK  
OUT A JOINT STRATEGY FOR CONTESTING THE ELECTIONS. THEY  
BEGAN MEETING IN DELHI ON JANUARY 19 AND THE NEXT DAY  
CONGRESS (O) LEADER MORARJI DESAI ANNOUNCED THAT THE FOUR  
PARTIES HAD AGREED TO ACT AS A SINGLE PARTY, THE "JANATA  
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(PEOPLES) PARTY," DURING THE CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, HE ADDED  
THAT THE FORMAL MERGER WILL NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL AFTER  
THE ELECTIONS. DESAI EXPLAINED THAT THE TIME WAS TOO  
SHORT TO FORGE A SINGLE UNITED PARTY BECAUSE OF "CER-  
TAIN TECHNICALITIES AND LEGAL NICETIES." NONETHELESS,  
THE FOUR PARTIES WOULD FUNCTION AS A SINGLE UNIT DURING  
THE ELECTION, WOULD HAVE A COMMON CAMPAIGN SYMBOL, AND

WOULD ENDEAVOR TO FIELD A SINGLE, MUTUALLY AGREED UPON CANDIDATE FOR EACH CONSTITUENCY. DESAI ALSO STATED THAT A NINE-MEMBER COUNCIL WOULD BE SET UP TO SELECT CANDIDATES FOR THE SEATS. WHEN ASKED BY NEWSMEN WHETHER ANY REGIONAL PARTIES WOULD JOIN THE JANATA GROUPING, DESAI REMARKED THAT "WE DO NOT REFUSE TO COOPERATE WITH ANYONE WHO IS RYD TO EXTEND COOPERATION TO US, BUT THIS HAS TO BE ON THE BASIS OF PRINCIPLE AND IN THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY."

2. AS FOR THE DMK, PARTY PRESIDENT KARUNANIDHI WELCOMED THE PROSPECT OF ELECTIONS BUT STATED FOR THE RECORD THA HE MUST CONSULT OTHER DMK LEADERS BEFORE ANNOUNCING THE PARTY'S PLANS. CONGEN MADRAS HAD EARLIER HEARD THAT THE DMK MIGHT BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS, BUT AT THIS POINT CANNOT SAY WHAT THE PARTY'S INTENTIONS ARE.

3. WHILE DESAI REITERATED THE OPPOSITION'S DEMAND THAT THE EMERGENCY BE TOTALLY LIFTED, ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS RELEASED, AND PRESS CENSORSHIP ENDED (HE MADE THIS STATEMENT BEFORE THE GOI ANNOUNCED SEVERAL STEPS TO FURTHER RELAX THE EMERGENCY), IT APPEARS THAT SO FAR THE FOUR NON-KOMMUNIST OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT THE GROUND RULES LAID DOWN BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS SERIOUSLY. INDEED, WHEN ASKED BY A NEWSMAN WHETHER THE OPPOSITION WOULD BOYCOTT THE POLL, DESAI SAID THAT THIS QUESTION HAD BEEN DISCUSSED AND REJECTED BY THE LEADERS BECAUSE "NO OTHER METHOD IS OPEN TO US." THE GOI'S SUBSEQUENT STEPS TO CONFIDENTIAL

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FURTHER CASE RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY (SEPTTEL) WILL FURTHER SWEETEN THE PILL FOR THE OPPOSITION.

4. THE NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION AND ITS SYMPATHIZERS IN THE PRESS ARE EVIDENTLY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF AND RELISHING THE FREER ATMOSPHERE PREVAILING IN THE COUNTRY SINCE THE PM'S ANNOUNCEMENT. SEVERAL OF TODAY'S PAPERS CARRY FRONT-PAGE PICTURES OF SMILING OPPOSITION LEADERS CLUSTERED AROUND MORARJI DESAI.

5. THE PRIME MINISTER'S RAPID MOVES TO EASE RESTRICTIONS ON THE PRESS AND TO GENERALLY NORMALIZE THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE HAVE PLACED OPPOSITION PARTIES IN A POSITION WHERE THEY CANNOT EASILY REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS, SINCE THEIR PRECONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION ARE NOW BEING MET. EVEN THOUGH THE EMERGENCY ITSELF IS NOT BEING LIFTED, THEY ARE HARDLY ABLE TO PRESS THIS POINT TOO FAR IN VIEW OF THE LIFTING OF PRESS CENSORSHIP, THE STEADY RELEASE OF THEIR DETAINED COLLEAGUES, THE

ANNOUNCED FREEDOM TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETINGS, AND SO ON. NONETHELESS, THE INITIAL REACTION OF A FEW OPPOSITION LEADERS TO THE ELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT DID LEAVE OPEN THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME MAY BOYCOTT. CPM LEADER E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD CLAIMED IN TRIVANDRUM ON JAN 19 THAT "FREE AND FAIR" ELECTIONS COULD NOT BE HELD AS LONG AS THE EMERGENCY WAS IN FORCE. HE AVOIDED A STRAIGHT ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE CPM WOULD BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS BY SAYING: "WE WILL SEE UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS THE ELECTIONS ARE HELD, AND THEN WE SHALL DO OUR MAXIMUM TO RAISE THE ISSUES WHICH WE THINK ARE NOT IMPORTANT. WHETHER IT WILL BE THROUGH BOYCOTT OR NOT IS TO BE SEEN." IN A SIMILAR VEIN, A LEADER OF THE FORWARD BLOC IN WEST BENGAL STATED THAT THE DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTION WOULD DEPEND ON THE LIFTING OF THE EMERGENCY, RELEASE OF ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND THE ENDING OF CENSORSHIP.

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6. MORARJI DESAI'S PERFORMANCE AT THE OPPOSITION LEADERS' JAN 20 PRESS CONFERENCE IN DELHI POINTS UP THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT AND JEALOUSY WITHIN OPPOSITION RANKS. MORARJI REPORTEDLY TOSSED ASIDE ONE QUERY ABOUT 'O. NARAYAN'S ROLE BY SAYING HE WAS NOT THERE TO DISCUSS NARAYAN; QUASHED ATTEMPTS BY SEVERAL OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS TO OFFER COMMENTS; AND TURNED ASIDE A QUIP BY PILOO MODY WITH A FROWN AND A WAVE OF HIS HAND. HE WANTS TO RUN THE SHOW AND WHETHER THE GROUP WILL SIT STILL FOR SUCH IMPERIOUS TREATMENT IS YET TO BE SEEN.

7. THE OPPOSITION CLAIMS TO BE ABLE TO PUT UP CANDIDATES FOR VIRTUALLY EVERY CONSTITUENCY --95 PERCENT ACCORDING TO PILOO MODY; 85 PERCENT ACCORDING TO OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS. THE CPI'S POSITION WILL BE ANOMALOUS: IN WEST BENGAL THE CONGRESS IS TALKING PUBLICLY ABOUT ELECTORAL UNDERSTANDINGS WITH THE CPI; THE SAME DEVELOPMENT IS EXPECTED IN KERALA. IN BIHAR, THE CHIEF MINISTER IS WAVERINGLY IN FAVOR OF AN UNDERSTANDING FOR FIVE SEATS FOR THE CPI WHILE THE PRADESH CONGRESS PRESIDENT IS BITTERLY OPPOSED AND THE DECISION WILL BE PUT TO MRS GANDHI. IN ALMOST ALL OTHER STATES, THE CPI WILL HAVE TO RUN AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY WHERE IT RUNS AT ALL. (WE WILL HAVE MORE TO SAY ON THE GENERAL CONGRESS/CPI/CPM EQUATION IN A SEPTEL IN NEXT FEW DAYS.)

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## Message Attributes

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Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009